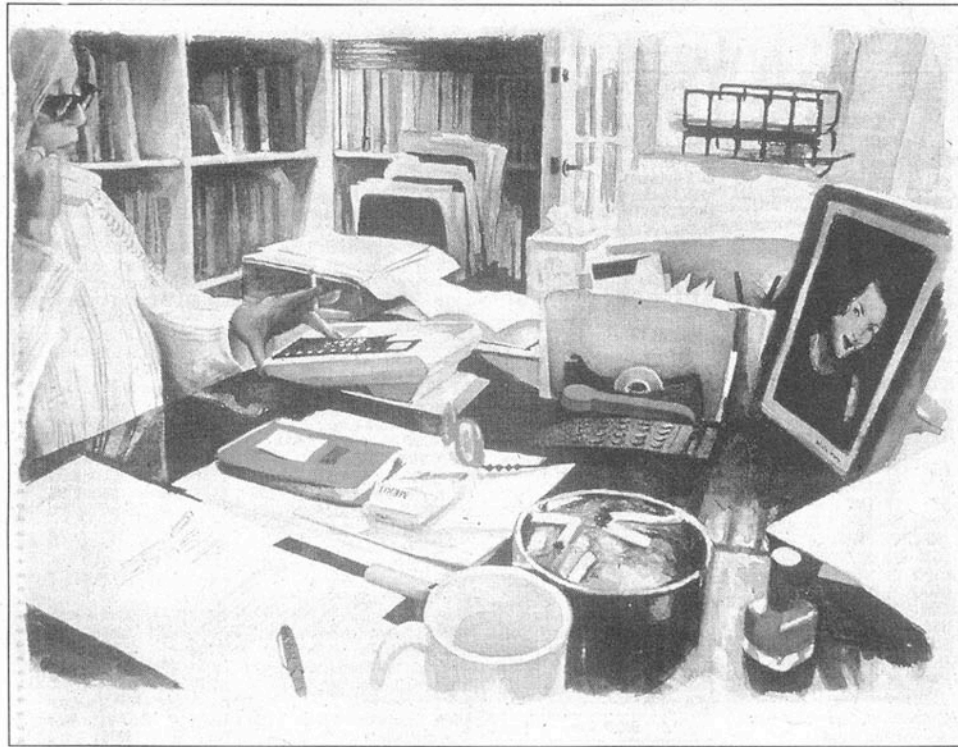


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DELIA BROWN

Delia Brown's "Untitled (Library)" (2001), a watercolor on paper. Her images originated as photographs.

Strength in Subtlety: The paintings, drawings and watercolors in Delia Brown's L.A. solo debut at Margo Leavin Gallery transform fantasy into reality by turning dreams about the future into mementos of a past that isn't what it used to be.

To work this curious magic, the young artist hired an assistant to photograph her and her dealer as they posed in Leavin's home on six days since last December—chopping vegetables, lounging poolside, watching the morning news, talking on the phone, applying nail polish, and chatting over coffee and cigarettes. Brown then took the pictures to her studio, where they became the basis for paintings and drawings.

Neither polished nor formulaic, her 35 works intensify the intimacy of the photographs. They combine the earnestness of an overachiever with the casual sensuality of youth—and the street smarts of someone who knows a good thing when she sees it. A sense of awkward vulnerability—of pushing just beyond the boundaries of one's comfort level—characterizes Brown's brushwork. It also suffuses the narratives suggested by her images.

Her drawings have the presence of studies in which details of lighting, scale and mood are worked out. The swiftly sketched portraits, which often include Leavin's dachshunds Pablo and Chiquita, convey ease and familiarity. Others feel tentative and uncertain. One, which shows Brown taking a shower as she chats with Leavin, makes palpable the nervous discomfort of the staged setup.

The artist is at her best with water-based media. Her light touch is well suited to the fluidity of watercolors, an unforgiving medium that demands you get it right the first time or forget it. There's also a domestic pulse to her translucent washes of color, whose ordinariness matches the pleasures depicted: sunbathing, gardening and relaxing with an afternoon cocktail.

Brown's paintings on panel add heft to such respites from the daily grind. One depicts a nighttime conversation in a dimly lighted room, its intrigue amplified by understatement. In contrast, three pictures of the pair arguing theatrically have the overblown presence

of caricatures. Subtlety is Brown's strength.

The seven oils on canvas display precocious aplomb in capturing the personalities of the sitters. But they're still a little stiff, neither as loose or lyrical as her smaller works.

The longer you look at the show as a whole, the more convinced you are that Brown is on intimate terms with her dealer. And if her works continue to be as well received as they have been, what was a fantasy less than a year ago will become a part of history. Art changes the world—only not how you expect it to.

Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson Blvd., West Hollywood, (310) 273-0603, through Dec. 15. Closed Sundays and Mondays.